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Relation between mental health and spirituality in Tehran University student

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between mental health and spirituality in college students. To accomplish this goal, 304 college students were selected from different colleges of university of Tehran, and the following measures were administered on them: Symptom checklist 90-R (SCL-90) and spiritual Experiences scale. Analysis of data revealed that there was a significant negative correlation between spiritual dimensions including: relation with God, finding meaning in life, spiritual actualization and activities. Transcendental mystical experiences, social and religious activities, and positive symptom distress index (PSDI).

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Keywords: Spirituality, mental health, college student.

1. Introduction

Research results demonstrated beneficial effects of spirituality on mental and physical health (Jang & Johnson, 2004; Hills et al., 2005; Doolittle & Farrell, 2004). Studies also have found close relations between divine being and promotion of mental and health (Easterbrook, 1999; Ellison & Levin, 1998). Benson (1996) demonstrated that individuals who use holy words and block intrusion of negative thoughts by means of repeating holy words; they experience a tremendous amount of tranquillity and restfulness.

Mohagheghi and colleagues (2008) conducted a research on the impact of performing religious rituals on mental health of college students and discovered that performing religious rituals was associated with better mental health. Empirical studies demonstrated relations between spirituality religiosity, and mental health in different groups, and populations. Theoretically, spirituality can relate to mental health and psychological well being by means of affecting their coping strategies, their attributional styles, their connectedness with university and their sense of meaning. Most studies in this area have been conducted in western cultures. Since religious and cultural background

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of people in Iran is different from those in western culture, studying the relation between spirituality and mental health in Islamic country of Iran is necessary.

2. Method

Design of current research is an ex post facto (co relational study), in which the relation between spirituality and mental health has been investigated.

2.1. Participants

In the current study 304 undergraduate college students were selected by means of stratified proportional sampling procedure. Spiritual experience Scale (Ghobary, 2002), and Symptom Checklist- 90 Revised (SCL-90R) were administered by a trained research assistant. Instructions for completing these scales were given to the students.

2.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used: symptom checklist- 90 revised to assess individuals' mental health status and spiritual experience scale (SES). Symptom Check List -90- Revised (SCL-90- R) is a checklist to evaluate psychological problems and identify symptoms. The test is developed by Derogatis and his associates (1973). Participants are required to respond 90 items using a 5 point scale. The scale assesses mental health status in 9 domains: anxiety, depression, hostility, paranoid ideation, phobia, and somatisation. Sensitivity in interpersonal relation, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and psychoticism. Test – retest reliability has been reported at 0.80 to 0.95 with time interval of one week. Derogatis and his associates (1976) have reported reliability coefficient of 0.87- 0.90 for this scale. In Iran Bagheri- Yazdi (1994) has obtained stability coefficient of 0.96 for this scale with interval of one week.

Spiritual experience scale was developed to measure adult's spirituality in various domains. This investigation intended to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure Spiritual, Religious, and Mystic Experiences (SRME) in university students. Based on reviews of theories in Islamic and western mysticism including Rumi's, Ibn Arabi's, and Rudolf Otto's ideas about religious experiences, Gnostic interpretations of Koranic verses and prophet's traditions, this test was developed. Structured interviews with college students were also carried out. To determine internal consistency of the questionnaire, the item-total correlation coefficient was utilized, and to calculate discriminant power (DP) of each question the top 27% and the low 27% of the sample in the spirituality scale were compared. On the basis of the Item-total correlation and discriminant power of items, 27 items were recognized as inappropriate and were therefore dropped from the questionnaire. Factor analysis was conducted on the remaining 75 items. Based on the Eigenvalue of 2 and steepness of Scree plot, six factors were extracted and the final analysis was accomplished with emphasis on these factors. These six factors include: "feeling of satisfaction and meaning in life", "effect of relationship with God in life", "spiritual action and actualization", "transcendental mystical experiences", "negative experiences", "religious and social activities".

3. Data analysis

Investigating the relation between mental health and spiritual experiences in college students was the first aim of the study.

Table (1). Multiple correlation coefficients between spirituality and mental health.

Spirituality Mental health	Findings meaning in life	Effect of Relation with God in life	Spiritual action and actualization	Transcendental mystical experience	Religious and social activities	Negative experiences
Depression	-0.69*	-0.25**	-0.17**	-0.13*	-0.14*	0.26**
Somatisation	-0.42**	-0.13*	-0.076	-0.034	-0.016	0.16**
Obsessive – compulsive	-0.57**	-0.19**	-0.093	-0.101	-0.083	0.24**
Obsessive- (SOM) scale	-0.50**	-0.17**	-0.051	-0.087	-0.038	0.24**
Interpersonal sensitivity	-0.54**	-0.13*	-0.12*	-0.075	-0.038	0.24**
Hostility	-0.40**	-0.19**	-0.582**	-0.044	-0.043	0.18**
Phobic anxiety	-0.44**	-0.11	-0.097**	-0.034	-0.002	0.24**
Paranoid ideation	-0.49**	-0.26**	-0.18**	-0.14*	-0.20**	0.27**
Psychoticism	-0.59**	-0.19**	-0.066	-0.088	-0.066	0.24**
symptom total positive	-0.62**	-0.20**	-0.11	-0.090	-0.069	0.27**
Global severity index (GSI)	-0.62**	-0.20**	-0.11	-0.090	-0.069	0.27**
Positive distress index (PSDI)	-0.58**	-0.29**	-0.29**	-0.15*	-0.14*	0.29**

** P<0.01

* P<0.05

To study the relation between spirituality and mental health investigators used multiple correlation analysis. Inspecting data in table (1), we can conclude that finding meaning in life, relation with God, Spiritual action, and actualization, Transcendental mystical experiences, and Religious and social activities have a significant relation, with depression in college students. Moreover, positive symptom distress index in symptom checklist was correlated with all dimensions of spiritual experience (i.e. Finding meaning in life, Relation with God, Spiritual action and actualization, Transcendental mystical experiences, Religious and social activities). Individuals who were spiritual, in comparison to others were healthier. In addition, data indicated that lack of spiritual experiences was positively correlated with anxiety, depression, and other psychological symptoms.

Looking at data in table (1), it is permissible to conclude that Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI) in symptom checklist is positively correlated with all dimension if spiritual experience. Individuals, who were higher in different dimensions of spirituality, were healthier than others.

Investigators also were interested to know whether individuals' mental health status can be predicted by their scores on spiritual experiences. Result shows that purpose in life, and transcendental mystical experiences can predict Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI) significantly.

The results of regression analysis indicated that %37 of variance in Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI) as an overall distress index is accounted by dimensions of spiritual experience scale. Overall omnibus "F" test indicated that at least one dimension of spirituality can predict Positive Symptom Distress Index in college students ($F_{2,245} = 69.85$, $P < 0.01$). Further analysis indicated that finding meaning in life ($t = -11.42$, $P < 0.01$), and transcendental mystical experiences ($t = -3.06$, $P < 0.01$) significantly predict Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI). Investigators also demonstrated that Global Severity Index (GSI) of distress in college students can be predicted by dimensions of spirituality scale.

The results of step by step regression analysis demonstrated that % 46 of variance in overall mental distress in college students which is assessed by (GSI) accounted by dimensions of students spirituality. Further analysis using

multiple regressions with ANOVAs table ($F_{3,244} = 69.86, P < 0.001$) showed that at least one of the dimensions of spirituality significantly predicts mental health of college students. Analysis of "B" coefficients demonstrated that finding meaning in life ($t = -12.93, P < 0.01$), transcendental mystical experiences ($t = 5.63, P < 0.01$), can significantly predict "Global severity index" in college students.

Investigators also were interested to explore whether the index of "Positive Symptom Total" (PST) can be predicted by dimensions of spirituality in college students. Regression analysis revealed the significant effect of students' spirituality on positive symptom total. The result of step by step regression analysis indicated that spirituality dimensions accounted for %46 of variations on "Positive Symptom Total". The result of "F" test ($F_{3,244} = 68.86, P < 0.01$) showed that at least one of the dimensions of spirituality predicts "Positive Symptom Total" in college students.

Further analysis revealed that "finding meaning in life" ($t = -12.92, P < 0.01$), and "transcendental mystical experience" ($t = 5.64, P < 0.01$) can predict Positive Symptom Total (PST).

4. Discussion

An important development in the scientific study of study religion over the past decade has been an increasing number of studies that have persuasively documented positive relationship between religious involvement and physical and mental health outcomes. For example, a recent meta- analysis has reported that religious involvement was significantly and positively associated with longevity (Mc Cullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig & Thoreson, 2000). Since this research have been done in a culture different from Islamic heritage, replication of their studies in Iranian culture was of a prime interest of investigators in this study.

The result of current study revealed a significant positive correlation between domains of spirituality and spirituality and mental health status of college students. More specifically the result of analysis revealed that "finding meaning in life", relation with God, spiritual action and actualization, "transcendental mystical experiences", and "religious and social activities" have been associated negatively with depression. In other words, with increment of students' scores in spirituality decreases in depressant take place. These findings were consistent with the results of Koenig and his associates (1995) who found spirituality and religious faith to be an important factor in predicting depression in adults.

Kennedy and associates (1996) conducted a survey in New York City, and discovered that increase in the risk of depression by 40% was associated with lack of weekly attendance in church activities. In addition, data revealed that somatisation; obsessive – compulsive disorders, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism were negatively associated with finding meaning in life. In other word, with increasing meaning in life in college students, their symptom in different domains of symptom checklist decreases. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Debates & Hansen. 1995; Addis et al, 1995; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Zika & Chamberlin, 1992). Current study also revealed that there were positive significant relations between lack of spirituality and psychological symptoms. Those findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Koenig, 1997, Koenig et al; 1999).

More over, results revealed that over all scores of students in symptom check list as measured by The Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI) were associated with all domains of spirituality. This finding also was consistent with previous studies (e.g., Benson, 1996; Christy, 1998). Result of the regression analysis also revealed that Global Severity Index (GSI) in SCL-90R can be predicted by transcendental mystical experience, finding meaning in life, and lack of spiritual experience. This finding is also consistent with previous studies (e. g. Mascaro, & Rosen, 2005; Zika & chamberline, 1992). The result also indicated that dimension of spirituality can predict overall index of Psychological symptom as indicated by "Positive Symptom Total" (PST). The results revealed that %46 of variance in positive symptom total accounted by variations in student's spirituality. These finding are consistent with previous findings (e.g., Miller & Thorensen, 2003; Mc Cullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig 1998).

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